



United States Department of Agriculture  
Forest Service

# Sanpoil

## Recreation Report

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**for:**

Republic Ranger District  
Colville National Forest

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## 1.0 - Introduction

This document is submitted as part of the analysis file for the Sanpoil Environmental Assessment. Knowledge of the planning area was developed through multiple days in the field inventorying recreation resources and discussions with the West Zone's Outdoor Recreation Planner. The analysis in this report focuses on the potential effects to the following recreation resource: Inventoried Roadless Areas (Cougar Mountain, Thirteenmile, and Bald Snow) identified in the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule.

All proposed fuel and vegetation activities are analyzed within this report since these activities may affect recreation opportunities and roadless area characteristics within the project area.

Recreation resources are not directly related to the purpose and need for this project and were not identified as being an issue during scoping for this project.

## 2.0 - Relevant Laws, Regulations, and Policy

### 2.1 - Regulatory Framework

#### **2.1.1 - Land Management Plan**

The Colville National Forest Land Management Plan (LMP) divides the project area into several “zones” called management areas. The Sanpoil Project area includes the following management areas: Administrative and Recreation Sites (ARS), Backcountry (BC), Focused Restoration, General Restoration (GR), and Research Natural Area (RNA), Riparian Management Areas, Scenic Byways, and Wilderness - Recommended. The LMP lists the desired conditions, objectives, standards and guidelines for each of these Management Areas and provides specific management direction for Access System (trail), Recreation, and Scenery Resources. This report incorporates the LMP by reference and is tiered to the Land Management Plan's Final Environmental Impact Statement (USDA Forest Service 2019).

#### **Special Area Designations**

The Sanpoil Project area includes the Cougar Mountain (approximately 4,700 acres), Thirteen Mile (approximately 12,700 acres) and western edge of the Bald-Snow (approximately 150 acres) Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs) as identified in the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule. Under the 2019 Colville National Forest Land Management Plan, Cougar Mountain and Thirteen Mile IRAs would be managed as Backcountry and the Bald-Snow IRA would be managed as Recommended Wilderness.

Part of the Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail Corridor, as designated by Congress in 2009, is located within the Sanpoil Project area. Generally, the trail corridor from west to east follows a cross-country route through the Cougar IRA from State Highway 21 to Forest Road (FR) 2054. From FR 2054, the corridor follows the Thirteenmile Trail #23 easterly to FR 2050600 where the trail corridor heads north for approximately two miles along FR 2050600 before leaving the project area in a northeasterly direction past Hall Ponds in the Bald-Snow IRA.

## 3.0 – Analysis Framework

### 3.1 - Resource Indicators and Measures

Table 1 identifies the recreation management indicators and measures used during my analysis to measure and disclose effects.

**Table 1. Resource indicators and measures for assessing effects**

Resource Element	Resource Indicator	Measure (Quantify if possible)	Used to address: P/N, or key issue?	Source (LMP S/G; law or policy, BMPs, etc.)?
Recreation	Change in roadless characteristics.	Number of roadless values or features as identified in the 2001 Roadless Rule that may be altered.	Yes	Law – 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule

## 4.0 - Methodology

The recreation analysis for this project was completed based on professional judgement. No models were used to support the analysis for this project and no assumptions were made.

### 4.1 - Information Sources

The analysis was supported through information contained in the Forest's GIS and INFRA databases, current field data, and by knowledge obtained through communication with the West Zone's Recreation Planner.

### 4.2 - Incomplete and Unavailable Information

There is no incomplete or unavailable information related to recreation resource management associated with this project.

### 4.3 - Spatial and Temporal Context for Effects Analysis

The spatial boundaries for analyzing the effects (direct, indirect, and cumulative) to recreation resources includes all National Forest System lands north of the boundary with the Colville Indian Reservation, west of the Republic/Three Rivers Ranger District boundary, south of State Highway 20, and east of State Highway 21. This area represents the area of potential impact to recreation resources associated with the Sanpoil Project. Outside of this area, the effects to recreation opportunities become stable as opportunities for dispersed recreation, trail use, and access to inventoried roadless areas become readily available.

The temporal boundaries for analyzing the effects (direct, indirect, and cumulative) to recreation resources are 5-15 years which allows five years (standard timber sale contract period) to implement all planned vegetation harvest work with an additional ten years to implement prescribed burning activities which frequently require additional time to meet approved burning windows so resource objectives can be met. However, the timeline associated with the immediate effects of harvesting or burning within specific units on recreation resources are generally short-term (less than 1 year).

## 5.0 - Affected Environment

### 5.1 - Existing Condition

**Table 2. Resource indicators and measures for the existing condition**

Resource Element	Resource Indicator (Quantify if possible)	Measure (Quantify if possible)	Existing Condition
Recreation	Change in roadless characteristics.	Number of roadless values or features as identified in the 2001 Roadless Rule that may be altered.	0

#### **5.1.1 – Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA)**

The Sanpoil Project area includes approximately 17,600 acres of Inventoried Roadless Area (Cougar Mountain, Thirteen Mile, Bald-Snow) identified in the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule. These three roadless areas were also identified during the RARE I and RARE II roadless area evaluations completed in 1972 and 1977.

There are six additional IRAs within 15 air miles of the Sanpoil Project area (Bangs, Clackamas Mountain, Hoodoo, Profanity, South Huckleberry and Twin Sisters) located on both the Colville and Okanogan (Clackamas Mountain) National Forests. Combined, these nine roadless areas encompass approximately 116,000 acres within the Okanogan Highlands ecoregion.

Interpretation of satellite imagery shows that each of the Sanpoil Project area's IRAs contain small segments of open system roads and two of the IRAs contain a portion of a developed trailhead. The Cougar Mountain IRA includes small sections of Forest Road (FR) 2054 on the east side and State Highway 21 and Thirteen Mile TH on the southwest corner. The Thirteen Mile IRA contains small sections of FR 2054300 and FR 2055000 as well as the Bear Pot TH along its north and west boundaries. The Bald-Snow IRA contains small sections of FR 2050600 along its western boundary.

#### **5.1.2 – Trail Based Recreation**

The Sanpoil Project area contains all or part of the following non-motorized trail systems: Edds Mountain #3, Nick's Loop #3.1, Barnaby Buttes #7, Snow Peak #10, Bear Pot #19, Thirteenmile #23, Nine Mile Falls #44, and Gibraltar Trail #46.

Nick's Loop Trail #3.1 was constructed over sections of FR 2050340 and FR 2050183. These roads are located all or partially within the Bald-Snow IRA and are being managed as closed NFS roads with an overlying trail route. An opportunity exists through this project to hydrologically stabilize these roads, remove them from the forest's road system and complete the conversion of the route to a non-motorized system trail.

Portions of the Gibraltar Trail are located on system roads that are typically closed to motorized use. These sections of closed system roads will be used during harvest and fuels work and will be returned to trail status once all harvest and burning activities are complete. Sections of the Gibraltar Trail currently receives consistent illegal motorized use. Management actions will need to be taken to reduce continuing or potentially increased motorized use of this trail system once vegetation and fuels activities are complete.

The planning area contains one short motorized trail (#4010) open to OHVs on a section of road that was closed to full-size motor vehicles in the Gibraltar Trail Construction decision.

The planning area also contains part of the Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail corridor designated by Congress in 2009. The trail corridor from west to east follows a cross-country route through the Cougar IRA from State Highway 21 to Forest Road (FR) 2054. From FR 2054, the corridor follows the Thirteen Mile Trail #23 easterly to FR 2050600 where the trail corridor heads north for approximately two miles along FR 2050600 before leaving the project area in a northeasterly direction past Hall Ponds in the Bald-Snow IRA. FR 2050600 is expected to continue to be used by an ever increasing number of through hikers for the duration of project implementation. There has been some discussion between local trail users and community members that the PNT should be re-routed through the project area, tie-in with the Gibraltar Trail, and connect to the City of Republic through the fairgrounds. However, since the PNT corridor was designated by Congress, this type of proposed re-route would need to be approved by the PNT Advisory Council as it develops the comprehensive management plan for the trail, which will, in part, identify where the trail will be located and constructed. Therefore, the Sanpoil Project, signed by the District Ranger, would not be the correct decision document in which to change the designated PNT route.

### **5.1.3 – Dispersed Recreation**

Numerous forms of dispersed recreation occur throughout the Sanpoil planning area in levels varying from seldom to moderate, depending on the activity. The most prominent forms of dispersed recreation (in no order of importance) occurring within the planning area include camping, hunting, berry picking, firewood gathering, Nordic skiing, snowshoeing, snowmobiling, and Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) use. The Forest currently provides a highly diverse number of recreation opportunities that are typically located near roads and high standard trails that are available throughout the year.

#### **Dispersed Camping**

Dispersed campsites are located throughout the planning area but are generally located along County Road 99 and FRs 2053 and 2054. Dispersed camping also occurs regularly at the six trailheads located within the planning area. These campsites generally develop over many years as a result of impacts associated with recreational use (loss of ground vegetation as a result of vehicle use, construction of rock fire rings, etc.). Most dispersed campsites within the planning area are located in small openings adjacent to Forest System roads, with a few campsites located in pullouts along the edge of the road prism or at the end of system roads.

Numerous dispersed campsites were identified during field surveys of open system roads within the project area in 2017. At that time, the majority of inventoried sites were located in generally healthy stands of mixed conifers that provided good screening and the opportunity for shade. Based on the level of soil disturbance, rock fire ring construction, tree damage, and user created structures (toilets, benches, game hangers, etc.), it appears that several of these dispersed campsites receive heavy use on a regular basis throughout the summer and fall months and are highly valued by the public.

There are also many inventoried dispersed campsites located in the planning area that appear to be used on an irregular basis, either as an opportunistic place to set up camp before dark, or during hunting season when dispersed campsites within the planning area receive their heaviest use. This assessment is based on the lack of soil disturbance, small fire rings, lack of tree scarring, and high degree of vegetation growing in the fire rings and campsite area.

### Snowshoeing/Backcountry Skiing/Nordic Skiing

Light levels of snowshoeing and nordic skiing originates primarily out of the Hall Creek Sno-Park on FRs 2050100, 2050110, 2053 and CR 99 within the planning area.

### Snowmobiling

Snowmobiling occurs throughout the planning area on six designated groomed (FRs 2050200, 2050400, 2050410, 2050470, 2053, and 2053955) and three designated ungroomed (FRs 2050100, 2050300, and 2050330) snowmobile routes within the Sanpoil Project area. Use in the planning area is light to moderate throughout the winter depending on snow conditions and peaks on weekends in January and February. Rarely does snowmobile use occur off designated routes or their connected road systems either as a result of inconsistent snow or terrain that is limited due to vegetation cover.

### Motorized (OHV) Recreation

Light to moderate OHV use has occurred historically throughout the planning area. Early use was predominantly by jeeps and motorcycles. This use has transitioned over the past decade to primarily four wheel OHVs (quads, ATVs, UTVs). Prior to the implementation of the Colville National Forest - Interim Motor Vehicle Use Map in 2006, this use occurred without designation or enforcement of routes. There are currently twelve (FRs 2050200, 2050460, 2053, 2053600, 2053800, 2053950, 2053955, 2053956, 2054, 2100500, 2100600; Trail #4010) designated routes for OHV use within the Sanpoil Project area shown on the Colville National Forest Motor Vehicle Use Map, Southwest Area (MVUM) which provide access to much of the planning area and several loop riding opportunities when connected by the County road system. OHV riding opportunities within the planning area are readily available and have been used in the past for non-commercial OHV group rides.

Although OHV use is generally light to moderate within the planning area and there are numerous riding opportunities, there continues to be interest from local OHV users and the Tri-County Motorized Recreation Association to provide for a system of OHV trails on the Forest that connects communities and provides loop riding opportunities. These traits were clearly identified by participants at the South End Motor Vehicle Use Project public meetings in 2009 as being important to the OHV experience on the Colville National Forest. Forest Road 2050600 has been identified by users as an opportunity to connect the towns of Republic and Inchelium by using additional routes located outside of the planning area on the Colville Indian Reservation.

## **5.1.4 – Developed Recreation**

The Sanpoil Project area includes ten developed recreation sites including the following trailheads (TH) picnic/river access site, and sno-park: Barnaby Buttes TH, Bear Pot TH, Cougar TH, Edds Mountain TH, Gibraltar TH, Ninemile Falls TH, Thirteenmile TH, Snow Peak TH, Ten Mile Picnic/Sanpoil River Access Site, and Hall Creek Sno-Park. The existing landscape character surrounding these recreation sites is highly valued by forest visitors and contributes to their sense of place when recreating within the project area. The landscape character should be maintained or enhanced around these developed recreation sites following the implementation of proposed harvest and fuel reduction activities.



## 6.0 - Environmental Consequences

### 6.1 - Alternative 1 – No Action

#### **6.1.1 – Roadless Area Characteristics**

Roadless area characteristics include values, resources or features that are often present in and representative of inventoried roadless areas, including:

- (1) High quality or undisturbed soil, water, and air;
- (2) Sources of public drinking water;
- (3) Diversity of plant and animal communities;
- (4) Habitat for threatened, endangered, proposed, candidate, and sensitive species and for those species dependent on large, undisturbed areas of land;
- (5) Primitive, semi-primitive non-motorized and semi-primitive motorized classes of dispersed recreation;
- (6) Reference landscapes;
- (7) Natural appearing landscapes with high scenic quality;
- (8) Traditional cultural properties and sacred sites; and
- (9) Other locally identified unique characteristics.

No immediate change would occur to the nine roadless area characteristics listed above associated with the Cougar Mountain, Thirteen Mile, or Bald-Snow IRAs if the No Action Alternative is implemented. Under this alternative, the existing vegetative, cultural, landscape, recreation opportunities, habitat, soil, water, and air quality conditions would remain unaltered. In addition, there would be no road construction or reconstruction (maintenance of existing classified roads would continue) and timber would not be cut, sold, or removed within the boundaries of the roadless areas.

Over time, however, the likelihood of a large, high intensity fire event within the planning area would increase as dead fuels continue to build-up on the forest floor and ladder fuels continue to grow in the understory. Should a large fire event occur, several of the existing roadless area characteristics listed above may change:

- Soil and water quality would likely decline as a result of increased erosion.
- Animal and plant diversity would likely diminish until plant communities could re-establish themselves sufficiently to support local wildlife populations. Nonnative invasive plant species could spread through the IRAs as a result of fire suppression activities or by out-competing native plants post fire.
- Large trees may be lost in a crown fire that could decrease habitat for TES species for decades.
- Opportunities for solitude and quiet associated with existing semi-primitive non-motorized dispersed recreation may be reduced within the IRAs as the visibility and sound of motorized use would likely travel further into the IRAs if a high intensity crown fire kills the majority of the overstory forested vegetation.
- Large reference landscapes (tens of thousands of acres) could be lost.

- High quality scenery and natural appearing landscapes may be altered for decades until plant communities and forests rebound, and erosion scars heal over time.
- Traditional cultural properties may be destroyed by fire and lost forever.

Under the no action alternative, there would be no reduction in the number of existing inventoried roadless acres. However, seven of the eight primary roadless area characteristics could be altered if a large, high intensity fire event occurred within the project area.

**Table 3. Resource indicators and measures for Alternative 1 – No Action**

Resource Element	Resource Indicator (Quantify if possible)	Measure (Quantify if possible)	Alternative 1 – No Action
Recreation	Change in roadless characteristics.	Number of roadless values or features as identified in the 2001 Roadless Rule that may be altered.	7

## 6.2 - Alternative 2 – Proposed Action

### 6.2.1 - Project Design Features

The project includes the following design features to protect existing recreation resources within the Sanpoil Project area.

- For the Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail Corridor, a “passing through treatment units” sign will need to be posted on both ends of active units along forest system roads 2050600 and at access points to the PNT throughout the project area to warn through hikers of potential safety hazards during project implementation. This applies to all treatment types. The purpose for this design feature is to protect recreationists from potential injury or harm.
- No harvesting, hauling of timber, or moving equipment would occur on the following holiday weekends: Memorial Day, Fourth of July, and Labor Day. The Fourth of July holiday includes, at a minimum, July 3<sup>rd</sup> through July 5<sup>th</sup>. This applies to all treatment types.
- Valued dispersed recreation sites identified and mapped (using GPS coordinates) by the District Recreation Specialist should be treated to enhance the long-term health and sustainability of the vegetation (overstory as well as understory) within the immediate foreground zone (0-300 feet) of each dispersed recreation site so that shade, screening and dust control are provided while also meeting the scenic integrity objective associated with each dispersed recreation site.
- Dispersed campsites proposed to be used as landings or equipment staging areas must be cleared by the District Recreation Specialist prior to their use. This applies to all treatment types.
- Meet the High Scenic Integrity Objective (SIO) in the immediate foreground distance zone (up to 300 feet of Barnaby Buttes TH, Bear Pot TH, Cougar TH, Edds Mountain TH, Gibraltar TH, Hall Creek Sno-Park, Ninemile Falls TH, Thirteen Mile TH, and Snow Peak TH. Marking of trees within the immediate foreground areas of the listed recreation sites will not be visible from the developed sites. This may include different methods for marking or not marking trees or blacking out marked trees as needed. Management actions adjacent to these recreation sites will not occur between July 1<sup>st</sup> and Labor Day. Use of trailheads as landings will need to be cleared through the

District Recreation Specialist. After a unit has been accepted, all evidence (i.e. tags, flagging, etc.) of the management action visible for 100 feet from occupied areas of the recreation sites will be removed. Project created hazards (i.e. partially burnt snags, damaged trees) within two tree lengths of a recreation site will be felled immediately.

- Trails (Edds Mountain #3, Nick's Loop #3.1, Barnaby Buttes #7, Snow Peak #10, Bear Pot #19, Thirteen Mile #23, Nine Mile Falls #44, and Gibraltar Trail #46) passing through treatment units will need to be signed on both ends of active units to warn recreationists of potential safety hazards during project implementation. Project created hazards (i.e. partially burnt snags, damaged trees) within a tree length of a system trail will be felled immediately. Single track trails will not be used to skid material. Damage caused by felling, burning, or skidding operations to listed trails will be corrected immediately upon completion of a unit. Signing will be coordinated through the District Recreation Specialist. The High SIO in the immediate foreground distance zone (up to 300 feet) will be met along all trail routes. This applies to all treatment types.
- Minimize post-harvest slash accumulation within high value dispersed campsites. After harvest and fuel treatments are complete, perform basic cleanup to any high value dispersed campsites located within the harvest units. Basic cleanup means restore the access route to the general pre-project conditions, restore the integrity of the fire ring, and remove slash from the core (fire ring, parking area, and tent area) of the campsite.
- Ensure burn plans for units within the Cougar Mountain, Thirteen Mile, and Bald-Snow IRAs use control methods that result in no road construction.
- If a timber sale operator or other contractor wants to use a dispersed campsite during project implementation, the District Recreation Specialist will be consulted and approve the proposed site(s) prior to selection. A camping permit and/or timber sale agreement will spell out the conditions for the commercial use of a dispersed campsite. The permit/timber sale agreement will also list the restoration activities that would be required by the contractor to return the occupied campsite(s) to the condition they were in immediately prior to occupancy by the contractor. Restoration activities may include decompaction, seeding, tree planting, and barrier rock work depending on the level of disturbance caused by the contractor's occupancy of the campsite(s). This applies to all treatment types.
- If winter harvest or haul operations are required for resource protection along CR 99 or FRs 2053 or 2050100, access will be limited to a single winter season. In addition, only one groomed snowmobile route should be closed to recreational use at a time to ensure winter recreation opportunities are available within the planning area during project implementation. If winter logging conditions deteriorate prior to all units being completed, additional winter seasons could be authorized if approved in advance by the District Ranger.
- If winter harvest or haul operations are requested by the purchaser, plow routes and operating windows will be discussed with the District Recreation Specialist and District Ranger prior to approving the request. Only one groomed snowmobile route should be closed to recreational use at a time to ensure winter recreation opportunities are available within the planning area during project implementation. This applies to all treatment types.

## **6.2.2 - Direct and Indirect Effects - Alternative 2**

### **Roadless Area Characteristics**

The effect to roadless area characteristics described below for the proposed action alternative are based on the assumption that proposed vegetation and fuels treatments outside of the IRAs along with the proposed fuel reduction and underburning activities within the IRAs would significantly reduce the likelihood of a

large, high intensity fire event within the inventoried roadless areas. However, if a large, high intensity fire burns through the IRAs post treatment, then the effects identified under the no action alternative would also apply to the proposed action alternative and would be in addition to the effects listed below.

Implementation of Alternative 2 – Proposed Action includes approximately 192 acres of shaded fuel break, 96 acres of hand pile burning, 96 acres of hand pile and machine pile burning, and 4,020 acres of underburning within the three IRAs in the Sanpoil Project Area.

Underburning would be implemented under conditions that would mimic a natural fire regime. Therefore, it is likely that underburning would maintain or improve the existing condition of roadless area characteristics identified in the 2001 Roadless Rule and listed in section 6.1.1 of this report within the three IRAs.

- The 4,020 acres of proposed underburning may benefit the quality of the natural appearing landscape by restoring ecosystem composition and structure back to the area's historic range of variability.
- The 4,020 acres of proposed underburning may improve habitat for those species dependent on large, undisturbed areas of land by removing the ground and ladder fuels that could feed a large, high intensity fire in the future.

However, implementation of shaded fuel break, and hand and machine pile burning treatments would likely alter several of the roadless area characteristics listed in section 6.1.1 including:

- The quantity of high quality undisturbed soil may be reduced resulting from compaction caused by motorized equipment and the burning of large slash piles resulting from the proposed fuel treatments.
- Plant diversity could be altered through the spread of nonnative invasive plant species introduced during fuels reduction work or by out-competing native plants within those areas impacted by pile burning.
- Opportunities for solitude and quiet associated with existing semi-primitive non-motorized dispersed recreation may be reduced by the potential for increased motorized access (game retrieval, firewood gathering, and vehicle supported camping) into the IRAs as a result of proposed fuel treatments that will remove trees below eight inches in diameter along open roads adjacent to each IRA's perimeter. The removal of understory up to 500 feet into the IRAs along open system roads may also increase the visibility of motorized use further into the IRAs and also increase the distance that vehicle sounds can be heard into the IRAs.
- Several hundred acres along the perimeter of large reference landscapes associated with the three IRAs would be thinned, reducing the size of those reference landscapes.
- Natural appearing landscapes with high scenic quality may be altered along the perimeter of the IRAs adjacent to FRs 2050600, 2054, and 2100500 as a result of proposed fuel treatments. These fuel treatments would extend up to 500 feet into the IRAs from the listed roads and would result in a "park like" setting where eight inch diameter and down trees are removed, piled, and burned adjacent to primary road systems. In addition, the 4,020 acres of proposed landscape burns (underburning) would likely benefit the quality of the natural appearing landscape by restoring ecosystem composition and structure back to the area's historic range of variability.

Under the proposed action alternative, there would be no reduction in the number of existing inventoried roadless acres. There would be no road construction or reconstruction within the IRAs (maintenance of existing classified roads would continue). Small diameter (less than 8 inches) timber would be cut, sold, or removed “to maintain or restore the characteristics of ecosystem composition and structure, such as to reduce the risk of uncharacteristic wildfire effects, within the range of variability that would be expected to occur under natural disturbance regimes of the current climatic period” per section 294.13 (b) (1) (ii) of the Final Roadless Area Conservation Rule as written in the Federal Register.

Two of the eight primary roadless area characteristics could be altered as a result of proposed underburning. Five of the eight primary roadless area characteristics could be altered as a result of proposed fuel reduction and pile burning activities on approximately 630 acres of IRA (approximately 4% of the total roadless acres within the project area).

**Table 4. Resource indicators and measures for Alternative 2 – Proposed Action**

Resource Element	Resource Indicator (Quantify if possible)	Measure (Quantify if possible)	Alternative 2 – Proposed Action
Recreation	Change in roadless characteristics.	Number of roadless values or features as identified in the 2001 Roadless Rule that may be altered.	6

### **6.2.3 - Cumulative Effects – Alternative 2**

#### **Past, Present, and Reasonably Foreseeable Activities Relevant to Cumulative Effects Analysis**

Relevant past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions found in Appendix A of the EA were considered. The only two projects on the list that overlap in space and time are permitted grazing and the construction of segments of the Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail. Neither of these actions would result in effects that would further alter the roadless values and features identified under the proposed action that characterize inventoried roadless areas under the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule.

## **7.0 - Summary**

### **7.1 - Summary of Environmental Effects**

Under both the No Action and Proposed Action alternatives, there would be no road construction or reconstruction (maintenance of existing classified roads would continue) within the IRAs and there would be no reduction in the number of existing inventoried roadless acres.

Under the No Action Alternative, no immediate change would occur to the nine roadless area characteristics listed in section 6.1.1 of this report associated with the Cougar Mountain, Thirteen Mile, or Bald-Snow IRAs. Under this alternative, the existing vegetative, cultural, landscape, recreation opportunities, habitat, soil, water, and air quality conditions would remain unaltered. Over time, however, the likelihood of a large, high intensity fire event within the planning area would increase as dead fuels continue to build-up on the forest floor and ladder fuels continue to grow in the understory. Should a large fire event occur, seven of the eight primary roadless area characteristics could be altered in a negative manner.

Under the Proposed Action alternative, the effects to roadless area characteristics are based on the assumption that proposed vegetation and fuels treatments outside of the IRAs along with the proposed fuel reduction and underburning activities within the IRAs would significantly reduce the likelihood of a large, high intensity fire event within the project area. However, if a large, high intensity fire burns through the IRAs post treatment, then the effects identified under the No Action alternative would also apply to the Proposed Action alternative.

Under the Proposed Action alternative, small diameter (less than 8 inches) timber would be cut, sold, or removed “to maintain or restore the characteristics of ecosystem composition and structure, such as to reduce the risk of uncharacteristic wildfire effects, within the range of variability that would be expected to occur under natural disturbance regimes of the current climatic period” per section 294.13 (b) (1) (ii) of the Final Roadless Area Conservation Rule as written in the Federal Register. Underburning would be implemented under conditions that would mimic a natural fire regime and would likely maintain or improve the existing condition of roadless area characteristics. Two of the eight primary roadless area characteristics could be altered in a positive manner as a result of proposed underburning. Fuel reduction and pile burning adjacent to forest roads and within the IRAs would likely result in five of the eight primary roadless area characteristics being altered in a negative manner on approximately 630 acres of IRA (approximately 4% of the total roadless acres within the project area). In total, six of the eight primary roadless area characteristics could be altered as a result of implementing the Proposed Action alternative. All existing recreation opportunities would continue to be available within the project area with a short-term decline in access during active harvest and burning operations.

## **8.0 - Compliance with the LMP and Other Relevant Laws, Regulations, Policies and Plans**

The vegetation and fuel treatments in the Proposed Action are consistent with the suitable uses management area direction contained in the Colville National Forest Land Management Plan (2019) for the Administrative and Recreation Sites (ARS), Backcountry (BC), General Restoration (GR), and Research Natural Area (RNA) management areas. The Proposed Action is also consistent with all relevant laws, regulations, and policy. Specifically, planned ignition fires (underburning, pile burning) and timber harvest (as a restoration tool) activities are suitable uses within the Backcountry Management Area and are also approved activities in the 2001 Final Roadless Area Rule. The BC management area in the Forest Plan overlays the Bald-Snow, Cougar Mountain, and Thirteen Mile inventoried roadless areas identified in the 2001 Roadless Rule.

The project area will continue to support a variety of recreation opportunities (developed recreation, dispersed recreation, trail, off-highway vehicle use and winter recreation) compatible with the Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized and Roaded Natural ROS classes within the planning area. No long-term change in the character or availability of recreation opportunities within the project area is expected. Short-term disruption in access to and use of developed recreation sites, dispersed recreation activities, trails, OHV activities and winter recreation due to localized harvest/burning activities (including temporary or permanent road closures) may occur. Several design features will be implemented to protect the existing recreation opportunities within the project area and ensure forest plan desired conditions, standards, and guidelines relating to recreation are met. Design elements will also ensure harvest activities and fuels treatments will be implemented to limit the exposure of forest visitors to hazardous management activities while improving the area’s ability to support a variety of recreation opportunities, particularly during periods of expected high use by the recreating public.

## 9.0 - Other Relevant Mandatory Disclosures

### 9.1 - Intensity Factors for Significance (FONSI) ([40 CFR 1508.27\(b\)](#))

#### Inventoried Roadless Areas

The proposed action would likely effect the characteristics of the inventoried roadless areas within the project area. Underburning may benefit the natural appearing landscape and improve habitat for those species dependent on large, undisturbed areas of land. Fuel reduction and pile burning along the perimeter of the IRAs may negatively impact the quantity of high quality undisturbed soil, reduce plant diversity through the spread of nonnative invasive species, reduce opportunities for solitude and quiet associated with existing semi-primitive non-motorized dispersed recreation, reduce the size of reference landscapes, and reduce the scenic quality of the natural appearing landscape. If fully implemented, underburning may improve roadless characteristics on approximately 4,020 acres (23% of the total IRA acres), while fuel reduction and pile burning may negatively affect roadless characteristics on 630 acres (4% of the total IRA acres).

As typically designed and implemented, underburning, fuel reduction and pile burning activities would not be expected to affect public health or safety. Unique geographic, historic, and ecologic characteristics would not be impacted as inventoried historic sites and TES plant populations would be flagged and avoided during implementation. It is likely that some members of the public will not support this work because proposed fuel reduction and pile burning activities may reduce the number of IRA acres that may be considered as recommended wilderness by the Forest Service during its next forest plan revision process which is expected to begin in approximately 15 years. The majority of community members are expected to support this work to reduce the likelihood of a large, high intensity fire event potentially impacting timber, wildlife, water, and air quality resources while protecting state highways and the community of Republic. The effects of the proposed activities on the human environment are well known after decades of implementing prescribed fire and fuel reduction projects. This project would not be precedent setting, result in significant effects to the IRAs, or preclude future decisions relative to the project area. No additional actions were identified that would cumulatively result in a significant impact to IRAs within the Okanogan Highlands ecoregion. The proposed actions would not result in the loss of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources as inventoried heritage sites and TES plant and wildlife species would be flagged and avoided during implementation. All federal, state, and local laws will be followed during the implementation of this project as they relate to inventoried roadless areas.

## 11.0 - Acronyms

CR – County Road

FR – Forest Road

IRA – Inventoried Roadless Area

LMP – Land Management Plan. Forest Plan.

PNT – Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail

SIO – Scenic Integrity Objective

TES – Threatened, Endangered, Sensitive Species

## **12.0 - References Cited**

USDA Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Region. *Colville National Forest Land Management Plan*. 2019.

USDA Forest Service. *Motor Vehicle Use Map, Colville National Forest Southwest Area*. 2017.

USDA Forest Service. Federal Register Vol. 66, No. 9. 36 CFR Part 294. Special Areas; Roadless Area Conservation; Final Rule. January 12, 2001.